

Construction program adapts to economic climate

Emily Beeson
Lead News Editor

The Building Construction Program is not running at Fremd this year for the first time since the program started in 1970 due to lack of enrollment.

The district-wide program allows students to gain experience in construction by building houses and other small projects.

The program needs around 20 students to run, according to Otis Price, director of athletics, activities and career development.

Chuck Chamberlain, director of summer school, evening programs and continuing education, feels students are missing out on an opportunity to learn the link between math, science and the real world.

"This program shows how a house is built and is a direct application of math and science," Chamberlain said. "It's like a math and physics lab along with students who like working with their hands."

One of the projects this year includes building a new concession stand with restrooms on the home side of Hale Hildebrandt Field. Although this type of construction used to be reserved for professional contractors, it is being completed by Hoffman Estates students in the program, according to Price.

Hoffman Estates students are constructing the concession stand for two reasons, according to applied technology teacher Paul Hardy.

"Hoffman students are build-



Logue photo by Camilla Skowronek

WELCOME. In addition to building Fremd's new concession stand, District 211 students are working on the interiors of two houses off Illinois Avenue and South Brockway Street.

ing the concession stand because the district is trying to cut costs, and not enough Fremd students signed up for the Building Construction Program," Hardy said.

The lack of participants in the program has to do with students' interests and needs as well, according to Chamberlain.

"Elective classes go up and down in participation depending on the year," Chamberlain said. "There are many variables such as a student's interests and needs."

Chamberlain said requirements for graduation limit students' availability to take the class, too.

Hardy believes that besides the time commitment of two

periods for the class, there are other reasons for the decrease in enrollment in the program.

"Construction jobs are hard to get because of the economy," Hardy said. "Also, Fremd didn't have a teacher in the building to teach the curriculum. Students couldn't put a face to the program."

Senior Geoff Tomaino said he would join the Building Construction Program if it took place after school.

"If it was an after-school program, there would be more participants," Tomaino said. "I could have a full schedule and participate in the program."

Fremd has not had a teacher for the program the last few years

due to waning student interest, according to Price.

The program used to include building one house in the community per year. Students in science classes visited the house to learn the physics behind the mechanics and structure of a house. The houses were then sold after an open house held in May to the highest bidder in a silent auction, according to Chamberlain.

Now, students build one house over the course of two years due to a change made by D211 last year. This year, students will work on other projects like the concession stand during the warmer weather and work on the interiors of the completed houses during the winter.

Previously, professional contractors would finish aspects like the plumbing, roofing and interior trimming after the school year was over. Students can now experience finishing the interior during the colder months.

"The district decided that once the bad weather comes, the students can go inside the house and finish the interior," Hardy said.

One house is currently being built in Inverness by Hoffman Estates students. Two more are being built in Palatine by Conant, Schaumburg and Palatine students.

In the past, houses have been sold for \$600,000 to \$800,000, according to Chamberlain.

Hardy says the changes in the schedule helped cut costs to keep the class.

"The program would've gone to the wayside if we didn't have these changes," Hardy said. "The district looked at projects that were needed so they didn't have to get contractors."

D211 budgets \$2 million annually for buying land and materials for Building Construction and for the district as a whole. This year, the district did not have to spend additional money to buy more land since students now build just one house in two years, according to Price.

Tomaino believes this was a smart way to cut spending.

"When there's a small demand for houses, you don't want to build too many [of them]," Tomaino said. "It was a necessary compromise to keep the program intact."

Paperless classes a legitimate possibility as teachers expand use of technology

Nick Palcheck
News Editor

Some teachers have turned to Internet resources such as Skype, Google documents, email and Ustream as a way to save money and make class more convenient for students.

English teacher Gary Anderson has been utilizing Ning, a social networking site, since late 2008.

"Using Ning allows for students that have questions to get involved in discussions with professionals," Anderson said. "Everything [on the site] is highly organized and interactive."

Ning also allows for reluctant students to become proactive in their learning.

"The students became much more responsible for their ideas," Anderson said. "In class, students can hide. With blogs, students are forced to contribute their ideas."

There are a few classes using some of these Internet sources in an effort to go paperless, including Project Lead the Way.

To cut back on the massive amount of paper use, almost all of Project Lead the Way activities are being done through the Internet.

Last year, each Project Lead the Way student turned in a binder with 300 or more pages of paper and about 150 plastic coverings for pages and packets.

This year, with 130 students in the program, 39,000 or more pages of paper would have been used for those binders if not for recent efforts to replace paper with technology.

Members of the Environmental Club support this paperless initiative.

"I think Project Lead the Way going almost paperless is a great idea. It will save many trees and reduce Fremd's

impact on the environment," Environmental Club vice president junior Bri Martin said.

Matt Owens, a sophomore in Project Lead the Way, feels that going paperless has its advantages.

"I don't have an issue with going paperless," Owens said. "It's a pain saving everything, but it helps the environment, and students don't lose time because of printer jams."

Applied technology teacher Nick Wedoff does not anticipate this change to affect students' grades.

"It's too early to tell, but the projects and the curriculum are mostly the same," Wedoff said. "If anything, procrastinators and disorganized students can benefit from the resources all being accessible to them on their computers."

A paperless system is also in use in math teacher Jan Boehm's Multivariable Calculus and Differential Equations class. Even for teachers, adapting to a paperless system takes time.

"I found it very difficult at first," Boehm said. "But now it's easier because everything is right here in front of me."

Wedoff thinks a paperless class creates some shortcuts for teachers.

"It's not easier to teach, but it is a lot easier to grade because I can look at all the assignments from all the students online," Wedoff said.

In addition to providing students direct access to their work, turning to a technology-based class offers more benefits, according to Wedoff.

"It changes how we give feedback, how we assign things and how we explain lessons and concepts to students," Wedoff said.

The paperless curriculum could spread to other classes, but it would require more computers and bandwidth.

"If we spent the money on the lab space, we could

establish more paperless classes. It would be better for students because they could learn at their own speed and style," Boehm said. "Unfortunately, it would require a large initial investment."

Wedoff also believes the paperless system might someday be expanded to a

variety of classes.

"As people get used to [Internet resources] and have more training in technology, using less paper in the classroom could occur in more classes," Wedoff said.

Still, Boehm believes that a traditional paper curriculum might still have a place at Fremd.

"Because [Multivariable Calculus and Differential Equations] is a new class, I wish I had a year to experiment with a normal class utilizing paper because it's what I'm used to," Boehm said.

Students appreciate the impact these changes have on the environment.

"I am excited to see Fremd teachers making an effort to use fewer resources," Martin said, "There is enormous potential to go green by changing high school classes."

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